Opening Statement

Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Jeff Duncan (R-SC)
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security

"Examining Challenges and Wasted Taxpayer Dollars in Modernizing Border Security IT Systems"

Remarks as Prepared

During the first half of this Congress, our Subcommittee has had a laser focus on how the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spends taxpayer dollars and how efficient and effective the Department's programs are during a time when the Nation faces unparalleled debt and fiscal challenges. As Chairman, I believe DHS must not only protect the homeland but do so in a fiscally responsible way. Yet time and again, hearing after hearing, we've examined findings from congressional watchdogs that show a Department with little interest in safeguarding taxpayer dollars. From duplicative programs, broken trust by airport screener misconduct, and ill-disciplined acquisition practices, effective management of DHS has consistently taken a back seat. Unfortunately, today's hearing is no different…another program in the ditch desperately needing a tow.

Today, we will examine DHS's efforts to modernize key information technology (IT) systems used by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), specifically the TECS modernization program. Having visited with border agents along the southwest border, I know firsthand how important it is for CBP officers and ICE agents to have the tools they need to secure the border. I know Ranking Member Barber shares that view.

For the CBP officer on the border, TECS is an integral tool to secure the homeland. The system helps officers determine the admissibility of over 900,000 visitors and approximately 465,000 vehicles into the country daily, share critical information with other federal law enforcement agencies, and alert officers to possible threats entering the U.S. For the ICE agent, TECS is a primary investigative tool used to document and build cases for prosecution. A legacy system in operation since 1987, TECS has become increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain due to the system's antiquated technology and its inability to support the requirements needed by CBP and ICE personnel in the field.

Despite TECS's critical importance to our security, CBP and ICE have failed to manage the modernization program effectively. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently reported, the result has been wasted taxpayer dollars, missed deadlines, and delays in fielding enhancements to CBP officers and ICE agents.

For instance, despite some success deploying functional capabilities to secondary inspection locations, GAO reported that CBP has revised its schedule and cost estimates because they were unachievable. CBP expects to complete the project by 2016 for a total cost of about $700 million. GAO further found that CBP did not develop a master schedule that links work activities to the overall project schedule, despite the fact that numerous projects are being developed concurrently. And while CBP contends the remainder of its concurrent program upgrades will be operational by the beginning of 2016, I am concerned that minus a sound master schedule, the project could be further delayed and over budget which could snowball into CBP officers not having the tools they need to do their job.

Of even more concern are ICE's failures. Due to unmet requirements, ICE is starting over on redeveloping its requirements after spending some $60 million and failing to produce any deliverables. After about 4 years and $60 million, ICE has little to show for, doesn't yet know the revised total cost, or what the program will achieve. The stakes are high because of a looming 2015 deadline that if not met will force DHS to spend more taxpayer dollars to maintain the system currently in use.

In addition, I am concerned that despite numerous management layers, DHS headquarters still let the program proceed. The DHS Chief Information Officer has increased oversight and governance of information technology by reviewing DHS component programs and acquisitions over the years. Yet the Office of Program Accountability and Risk Management; two Executive Steering Committees; and the Office of the Chief Information Officer's Enterprise Business Management Office all failed to adequately address escalating problems associated with the TECS modernization effort.

Further, the lack of complete, timely, and accurate data from the components to the DHS Chief Information Officer as reported by the GAO negatively affected the Department's ability to make informed and timely decisions on the program. Even the best governance framework won't improve outcomes if senior DHS leaders don't have the discipline to enforce it. DHS must hold programs accountable. If they fail, then we will hold DHS accountable.

With the speed with which technology advances today, it shouldn't take DHS eight years to complete an IT project. Private sector CEOs likely wouldn't tolerate such poor performance and management. Neither should DHS. It's an affront to the American taxpayer and it's time DHS do better.

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